FINAL FANTASY IV AND THE INFLUENCES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN

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By Kent

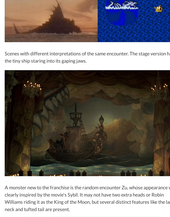
Final Fantasy IV has its share of pop culture precursors to delve into. The nods to *Star Wars* are fairly obvious, like its hero Cecil's quest to become a Jedi paladin and defeat Golbez. The tidbits inspired by Terry Gilliam's *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* get far less love, and to my knowledge, none of it's officially confirmed. So let's nerd out over the obvious references and stuff that could just be coincidence. Spoilers for some decades-old media.

A couple of years before *Final Fantasy IV* (1991) came out, The Adventures of Baron Munchausen was released in Japan under the shortened title of *Baron* (1989). The game makes no secret of its muses, naming the protagonist's homeland and starting location the kingdom of Baron.

This particular homage goes a few steps further. The deposed and confusingly named King Baron can eventually assist you as the Eidolon Odin. In this form, aside from striking a similar pose to his namesake as on the Japanese LaserDisc cover, he also shares the Baron's knack for slicing through extras on horseback.

The movie has Uma Thurman playing the goddess Venus and the actress Rosa. I'm pretty sure the game's White Mage and love interest, Rosa, isn't just named after the latter but also managed to adopt both roles' hairdos through the magic of being drawn by different artists.

Oliver Reed's Vulcan pushes around mythological strongmen to build anachronistic war machines. *FF4*'s Cid is a burly, bearded military engineer lugging a hammer who ends up bossing around tank-building Dwarves to work on airships.

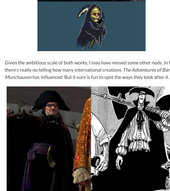


Both happen in red-tinted, cavernous, subterranean worlds reached by descending through a volcano and ignoring a lot of laws of physics.

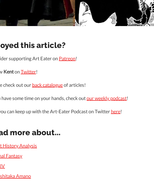
Sarah Polley's Sally is a bushy-haired girl miffed about her town getting a case of the explosives. She begins her travels with a former soldier separated from his friends, stows away on the airship that flies to the Moon, and gets swallowed by a sea monster. *FF4*'s resident Summoner Rydia goes through similar experiences with some changes. Namely in the order of events and amount of crippling trauma involved, but at least she gets to cast stuff.

Speaking of sea monsters, its role in the game is filled by Leviathan, whose plot involvement is... really hard to explain and raises some moral questions that never get resolved. Like Odin, the *Final Fantasy* monster was already introduced in an earlier installment and I think Square just ran with the opportunity to allude to more movie scenes.

Scenes with different interpretations of the same encounter. The stage version has the tiny ship staring into its gaping jaws.



A monster new to the franchise is the random encounter Zu, whose appearance was clearly inspired by the movie's Sybil. It may not have two extra heads or Robin Williams riding it as the King of the Moon, but several distinct features like the lanky neck and tufted tail are present.



The face on the Moon in *Final Fantasy IV*'s very definitely modeled after the Face on Mars, lighting and all. It's just a background Easter egg in the first few versions of the game but gains additional features in the remakes.

I suspect it's on the Moon to serve as a second reference- one of the first shots of the Moon's surface in *Baron* has a similarly angled and lit statue. It's even possible the film was making its own allusion to the famous space probe photo.

In any case, this statue likely left a larger impression on Japan considering it was featured on their poster for the movie. The same poster has the phrase, "To the Moon, to the underground, and to the ocean.," the locales covered in the game.

Here as well as on the LaserDisc cover, the Pisces seen swimming near the Moon likewise gets top billing. It might not be a mammal, but when you cover a marine animal in glowy bits and have it fly through space, it bears some resemblance to the game's final vehicle, the Lunar Whale.

Lastly, this is the *Final Fantasy* that began the series tradition of death spells being represented by the Grim Reaper. Granted Japan loves it some Reapers so the idea could have come from anywhere, the one it's blames its eerie grin and glowing pupils with the movie's memorable rendition.

Given the ambitious scale of both works, I may have missed some other nods. In fact, there's really no telling how many international creations *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* has influenced. But it sure is fun to spot the ways they took after it.

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